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# THE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF TEACHERS IN COLLEGE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION <sup>1</sup>

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## THE VIEWS OF CERTAIN COLLEGE PROFESSORS

About half of the New England colleges and universities now offer some instruction in the history, principles, and problems of education; a few of these also offer the privilege of practice teaching under criticism. Teachers in these institutions have, therefore, opportunity to consider, in a practical way, the value of the study of education as a distinctively professional training for those college students who intend to teach. Do they, in point of fact, now attach enough importance to this training to give it weight in their recommendations of prospective high-school teachers? What comments have they to make on the general question of professional training for such students? These queries your committee sought to answer by correspondence with representative members of sixteen New England college and university faculties.<sup>2</sup> Three colleges included in this list offer no courses in education; letters were sent to them chiefly by way of securing answers to the second of the above questions. To facilitate comparison with the attitude of superintendents of schools on these matters, the letter sent out was identical with the one described above (p. 171) by Professor Dawson.

A preliminary word is necessary as to the significance of the returns. Our inquiry was limited by the time and funds at our disposal; consequently we excluded from the list those college

<sup>1</sup> Professor William T. Foster, of Bowdoin, College, who was unavoidably prevented from preparing this article kindly placed his notes at the disposal of the writer.

<sup>2</sup> Amherst, Bowdoin, Boston University, Brown, Dartmouth, Harvard, Holy Cross, Middlebury, Mount Holyoke, Tufts, Simmons, Smith, Wellesley, Williams, Yale, University of Maine.

teachers who are presumably not often called upon to recommend teachers for secondary schools, such as professors of the oriental languages, philosophy, the fine arts, and various branches of engineering. Those included were professors of Latin, Greek, French, German, English, history, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. These are the men and women who are probably most often asked as to the qualifications of prospective high-school teachers; they are also presumably most directly interested in efficient teaching in those schools. Their opinions are therefore of especial importance as indicating the academic attitude toward the professional training of these teachers.

To the one hundred and sixty-five letters sent out, one hundred and thirteen replies were received, representing all the institutions and branches of study concerned. It is hardly necessary to say that they are of little statistical importance; their chief value lies in their indication of the probable drift of present practice and opinion, and in their actual contents. In discussing them I shall consider, first, the attitude of college professors on the question of giving practical weight to the study of educational principles and problems in their recommendations of prospective teachers; and, second, their general comments on professional training of such students for teaching. These last will be treated in a separate article.

The actual practice among our correspondents is indicated by the table below. I have classified as affirmative, and negative, respectively, those who do, or do not, take account of professional training, i. e., college courses in education, in their recommendations. The non-committal give no indication of their practice. A few, who do not mention the direct study of educational principles and problems, give weight to such professional training as comes from more or less formal instruction in the methods of teaching their own subjects; a few others are unable to consider the matter because their colleges offer no courses in education; these form separate groups.

1. Affirmative .....	35
2. Favor courses in methods .....	9

3. Non-committal .....	17
4. Negative .....	42
5. No courses available .....	10

Putting the matter more simply, the practical situation is that about 40 per cent. of our correspondents more or less actively support in their recommendation some form of professional training; 60 per cent.—if we include the non-committal—do not. This, be it repeated, indicates merely existing practice, it does not indicate the existing opinion as to the value of such training. As will appear later, this opinion is more favorable than the above figures might imply.

Direct quotations will bring the situation before us more clearly than any tabulation. In selecting those which follow I have endeavored to represent fairly all shades of practice and opinion within each group.

"I regret to say that very few of the candidates I have to recommend have done any work in education, although most of them have had experience as teachers. When I do find a candidate who has pursued pedagogical studies, I lay great stress on that fact in my description of him. The question of a choice between one with and one without pedagogical training has never arisen."

"We offer an elective course in pedagogy of two terms to members of the senior class who wish to teach. In recommending members of the class for positions I lay a good deal of stress upon the training they have had in the general subject of pedagogy and the history of education. This has seemed to me important in view of their experience, and as, in some measure, making up for it. How much weight this has with employers I cannot say. But I am sure the training, with what little practice in teaching the students can get by practicing upon themselves, has been useful to them in beginning their work."

"I usually mention the work in education done by any candidate. The amount of weight to be given to the fact of such work I leave to the school officers to determine. The fact that I mention the work shows that I regard it as of some value. Where an ordinary course in education has been accompanied by a seminary and by practice in teaching I have made these facts the basis for a more emphatic recommendation; but these cases have been usually ones where I have had some personal observation of the teacher's work."

"We should always give the preference, other qualifications being equal, to a candidate who has had the studies in education, both in recommending,

and in selecting candidates for vacancies here. The exact weight given would be hard to state."

"I give great weight to any such professional training both in recommending and in hiring teachers. The more they have to begin with the less they will have to get by experience, and hence the more valuable their first years of teaching."

"In my view, personal qualities, such as zeal, sympathy, tact, and conscience, come first; culture, both general and (in the fields in which the candidate wishes to teach) specific, second; and pedagogy broadly interpreted, third. But to the third I give great absolute weight."

Several, who do not as yet see the value of the definite study of educational principles and problems, nevertheless believe in more or less formal instruction in the ways and means of teaching their special subjects, as the following replies indicate:

"In — College it is customary to pay particular attention to the preparation for teaching in the giving of some of the advanced courses in such subjects as French, German, Latin, and mathematics. In particular is this true in Latin, where a course is designed specially to prepare our graduates for positions as teachers. In the giving of recommendations we naturally bear in mind the work done in these courses and recommend them more or less highly accordingly. This college offers no courses whatever in education and it is only indirectly that our graduates have received special training for such work."

"Until within a year or two no courses dealing specifically with the principles and problems of education have been given here. Courses dealing with the aims and methods of presenting peculiar subjects have been given in Latin, Greek, and mathematics, and in recommending graduates I have given emphasis to their work in such courses."

The non-committal replies, although rather numerous, hardly call for extended citation. The following example is fairly typical of the entire group:

"Since I am not asked questions about candidates on any other matters than their scholarship and experience, I find it impossible to say how much weight I give to their having studied education or its equivalent."

The negative replies do not necessarily imply hostility to, or disbelief in the value of, the study of education by prospective teachers. They indicate primarily that for various reasons the writers do not take actual account of professional training in their recommendations. Six of these do express direct opposition; twenty more answer with more or less emphatic negatives,

from some of which one might infer an unexpressed disbelief in such training. Of the others, seven testify only to work done in their own departments; and ten, in spite of their actual practice, concede in various degrees the value of professional training. The various shades of opinion are illustrated in the following citations:

"I attach no weight to this matter at all and have myself not much confidence in any pedagogical instruction; nor do I see the practical value of studying the history of education or of educational problems."

"I have never even asked whether they had pursued 'studies in the principles of education.' I give very great weight to their pursuit of 'such studies as look especially to preparation for teaching,' meaning thereby the study of the particular subjects which the candidate expects to teach."

"It appears to me that the gift of instruction is a natural one and that education methods taught as a science are of little avail. A *good* teacher will develop his own method; a *poor* one is neither saved nor much benefited by drill in the principles of education. In recommending a graduate for a position I reply wholly upon such characters as she has shown in my acquaintance with her, not upon any training in methods of teaching that she may have had."

"I do not give the fact any weight, and usually have no knowledge concerning it."

"I have never given any consideration to the fact."

"I never take the matter into consideration for a moment."

The foregoing replies represent the more emphatic negatives. I shall now quote a few which are more or less qualified.

"It has been my custom for many years to testify to the matter within my knowledge only. If a man is highly trained in chemistry, he gets a detailed statement to that effect; if he adds practice in laboratory instruction under our oversight, that is added to his statement; if he has taught successfully, the fact is mentioned, leaving those who have personal knowledge to give details. We do not at present find much reason to emphasize courses in pedagogy as greatly qualifying teachers of chemistry, but we assume that testimony will be secured from those who give the courses."

"As recommendations are requested only for teachers in my particular branch, I do not take into consideration their other studies, basing my views as to their fitness only upon their work with me or my knowledge of their actual practical experience."

"In point of fact I am usually called upon to recommend teachers of English literature, and I base my recommendation on their natural perception of literary values, their private reading, and their class training. I have

the general impression that pedagogical classes are of a distinct practical value, but I have not given this subject close or critical attention."

"In recommending graduates I have not considered their work in the courses in education. This does not mean that I count these courses as of no value; but I should not recommend a graduate as a teacher with any emphasis, unless I had seen those elements of mental power and general character which I believe will insure success either with or without the study of pedagogics. I believe a knowledge of the history and theory of education may improve a teacher but cannot make one. This same knowledge may be a positive hindrance if the teacher tries to do work in another's manner."

"None whatever. Not but students having studied educational problems might, other things being equal, prove more useful teachers. But the question does not arise. It is so subordinate to other factors like the personal equation, absolute knowledge of the subject in hand, etc., that it is not reached in considering my line of work, represented broadly by: Dante in Italian, Calderon in Spanish, and Corneille in French."

The replies from ten men whose colleges do not offer courses in education—and who therefore cannot take the work into account in their recommendations—are interesting because of their comments upon the general subject. Eight of the ten express views similar to the following:

"I regret to say that the comparative infrequency with which candidates appear prepared in the formal study of education has precluded any systematic attention to the question as to whether or not such studies have been pursued. I should cordially welcome regular expectation of the study of pedagogy as a preliminary to teaching."

"If we offered such courses here I should certainly be disposed to favor those who had pursued them, in recommending men for certain positions."

"I think very decidedly that colleges should give more attention to courses in education than most of them appear to be doing. A college is a good training school for teachers so far as knowledge and culture are concerned, from the very nature of its work, and it would be a great addition to its usefulness if it would add the opportunity for its students to acquire a more thorough knowledge of education, theoretical and practical. This seems the more desirable since the educational work can be made just as cultural as any other."

With these replies before us, we are in position to estimate fairly present college practice and opinion on the question at issue—always, of course, within the limits of the actual returns. As already indicated, hardly two-fifths of our correspondents lay stress on any form of professional training, and—eliminat-

ing those who refer only to courses in methods—slightly less than one-third attach importance to the study of educational principles and problems. The state of opinion as to the value of this study is somewhat more favorable. Representatives of each of the last four groups given in the table above, say that in spite of their failure, or lack of opportunity to take it into actual account, they nevertheless believe it is more or less useful to prospective teachers. Numerous expressions to this effect, weak and strong, are to be found in the quotations above given. If we add all these, and others not cited, to those of the first group, who are obviously of favorable opinion, it appears that sixty-four out of one hundred and thirteen—rather more than half—take this view. Half a dozen express direct opposition; the views of the others are left to our inference.

When the best has been said, however, there is still noticeable a marked contrast to the attitude of superintendents of schools, shown in the preceding article. The contrast is emphasized by comparison of the general spirit and tone of the two sets of replies. Yet, for several reasons, I am disposed to regard the results optimistically. It is clear to me, from nearly a decade of experience, that there is a slowly growing recognition of the need of professional training for teachers. I have seen the gradual disappearance, in the college world, of mere prejudice against it, and the growth of a disposition to suspend judgment on the part of those who lack information concerning our work and our ideals, as well as the appearance of active support. I believe, in short, that the results would have been much less favorable ten years ago. A second reason for my feeling is that many of those who attach little or no value to the professional training of teachers clearly misunderstand not only its character and presuppositions, but also our views as to its value; they mistakenly attribute to us opinions which, if we held them, would be ample reason for distrust. Removal of these misunderstandings may not bring about complete agreement with us, but it should certainly diminish opposition which comes from sheer misapprehension.

Again, I believe that fuller knowledge as to the actual per-



formance of untrained and inexperienced college graduates in our high schools will considerably modify the views of many as to the need of professional training. The testimony of superintendents of schools to this need forms a body of evidence altogether too weighty to be ignored. It is not my province to rehearse the evidence in detail. Some of it may be gleaned from the replies cited by Professor Dawson; but it is not confined to our correspondents; we have all heard it for years. I do not speak, of course, of those college graduates of experience who have survived in the schools and who have reached—often with much blundering at the expense of public and pupils—undoubted skill and power, but of the untrained novices. Concerning these I am certain that such utterances as the following will be widely approved by other superintendents of schools.

“As a rule, I find college graduates lamentably ignorant of the principles that underlie good teaching.”

“The ordinary college graduate knows very little of the best methods of teaching and wastes a good deal of time, both his own and that of his pupils, in learning.”

“Teachers fresh from college show great weakness in the ability to properly present the subjects they teach, though they have good knowledge of the subjects themselves.”

“I have had personal experience with several bright college graduates who nearly or quite failed through lack of understanding what teaching means.”

“In general, young women leave college with little or no idea of what real teaching means. Their training must be acquired at the expense of the school, and the pupils where they begin their work. . . . Right training would vastly improve the work of these young women from the beginning.”

“I prefer to have them make their mistakes in some other town.”

I quote these replies merely to emphasize my belief that a fuller knowledge of the situation may change the views of some who have honest doubts. The whole matter deserves extended study. But the topic which immediately concerns us is the removal of misunderstandings in regard to our own work, which are revealed through the general comments of our colleagues. These misunderstandings are so various and so widely spread as to demand a separate discussion.